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INQUIRY

Topic: ESPIONAGE

Ladislav Bittman, 52, is a former major in the Czechoslovakian intelligence service who defected in 1968. He has written books on the KGB, and while an agent co-authored a book that falsely listed diplomats and journalists as CIA agents for disinformation purposes. Bittman was interviewed for USA TODAY by free-lance writers Nowlan M. and Susan Ulsch.



Ladislav Bittman

Soviets find USA most difficult target

USA TODAY: A former U.S. Army counterintelligence agent was arrested Wednesday for selling secrets to the Soviet Union. How successful has the KGB been in penetrating the United States?

BITTMAN: The Soviets have succeeded in recruiting some second-rank officials in a few agencies — including the CIA. In the last 10 years, several cases have been exposed — cases of individuals who worked for the Soviets inside the CIA. However, there hasn't been one single case of a congressman or a senator exposed as a Soviet agent. There hasn't been a single case of a major journalist in this country exposed as a Soviet agent, while this happened in many cases in Western Europe. So this country remains the most difficult target for the Soviet Union.

USA TODAY: Does the Soviet Union remain a difficult target for the United States?

BITTMAN: Yes. The Soviets enjoy the major advantage. Since they (Soviet agents) operate in an open society in the United States, they can use various undercover operations. It is very difficult for the Americans to do the same thing in the Soviet Union. For example, if the CIA recruits an editor in the Soviet Pravda, he wouldn't be able to do much, because if he receives, for example, an instruction to publish an article criticizing the secretary general of the Communist Party, he wouldn't be able to do it — even as an editor — because anything that goes against the policy of the party cannot be published.

USA TODAY: What kind of games are being played against the U.S. intelligence community?

BITTMAN: In the last decade, the major objective of the Soviets was to paralyze American intelligence worldwide, to undermine the reputation of the CIA, to label it as a very unreliable source of infor-

mation, to label it as a criminal organization, and to achieve moral disintegration of the CIA. This long-term campaign against the CIA started in the mid-1960s, and then intensified in the 1970s. It became very busy after the investigation of the CIA by the Senate, because much damaging information was available to the press and to the public, which was then used by the Soviets in a worldwide campaign against the CIA.

USA TODAY: Did you ever personally participate in any campaign against the United States?

BITTMAN: I personally participated in a number of actions in the 1960s against the CIA around the world. One of them was, for example, a book called *Who Is in the CIA?*, which included the names of a few hundred Americans. About 50 percent of these people were real CIA operatives, while the rest of the individuals had never had anything to do with the CIA. Most of them were just diplomats, representatives of various organizations, journalists who were known to the Soviets as strong opponents of the Soviet system. They were labeled as Soviet operatives.

USA TODAY: Wasn't your find of Nazi archives at the bottom of Black Lake in Czechoslovakia used for propaganda purposes?

BITTMAN: Mainly, it was used later to hurt the German image in West Germany. A number of these original Nazi documents, which were very carefully selected, were published in Italy, France, Poland, and in West Germany, showing that Nazi intelligence was operating also against its allies, like Italy. The objective was to revitalize the image of Nazi danger and to label West Germany as the logical successor of Nazi Germany — to revive this feeling of fear of the Nazis and West Germany as a potential danger. The one positive aspect from it was that West Ger-

many made the decision to extend the statute of limitations for the prosecution of Nazi war criminals, although I cannot claim that it was only this operation that forced West Germany to do it.

USA TODAY: Are the Soviets more successful at penetrating other nations than the United States?

BITTMAN: It is much easier for them to operate in West Germany, in Great Britain, in Austria, or in the Scandinavian countries than it is in the United States.

USA TODAY: How is the KGB organized?

BITTMAN: KGB means the Committee for State Security. The KGB actually is like the CIA, the National Security Agency, the Coast Guard, and a number of other security and defense agencies together. They have it under one roof.

The KGB has about 500,000 people all together. Out of these 500,000, about 25,000 are involved in foreign intelligence. That is the equivalent of the CIA.

USA TODAY: When you were in the Czech secret service, what was its relationship with the KGB?

BITTMAN: It was very close. Actually, the Czech intelligence was established under the supervision of the KGB. From the very beginning, every major operation was planned, coordinated and evaluated together with the Soviets. The Soviets also controlled the writing of the so-called long-term operational plans, which had to be in tune with Soviet foreign policy interests. So the control was complete. Most of the operations that were conducted by the Czech intelligence were for the Soviet benefit, not for the Czechs. It has intensified in the last years.

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